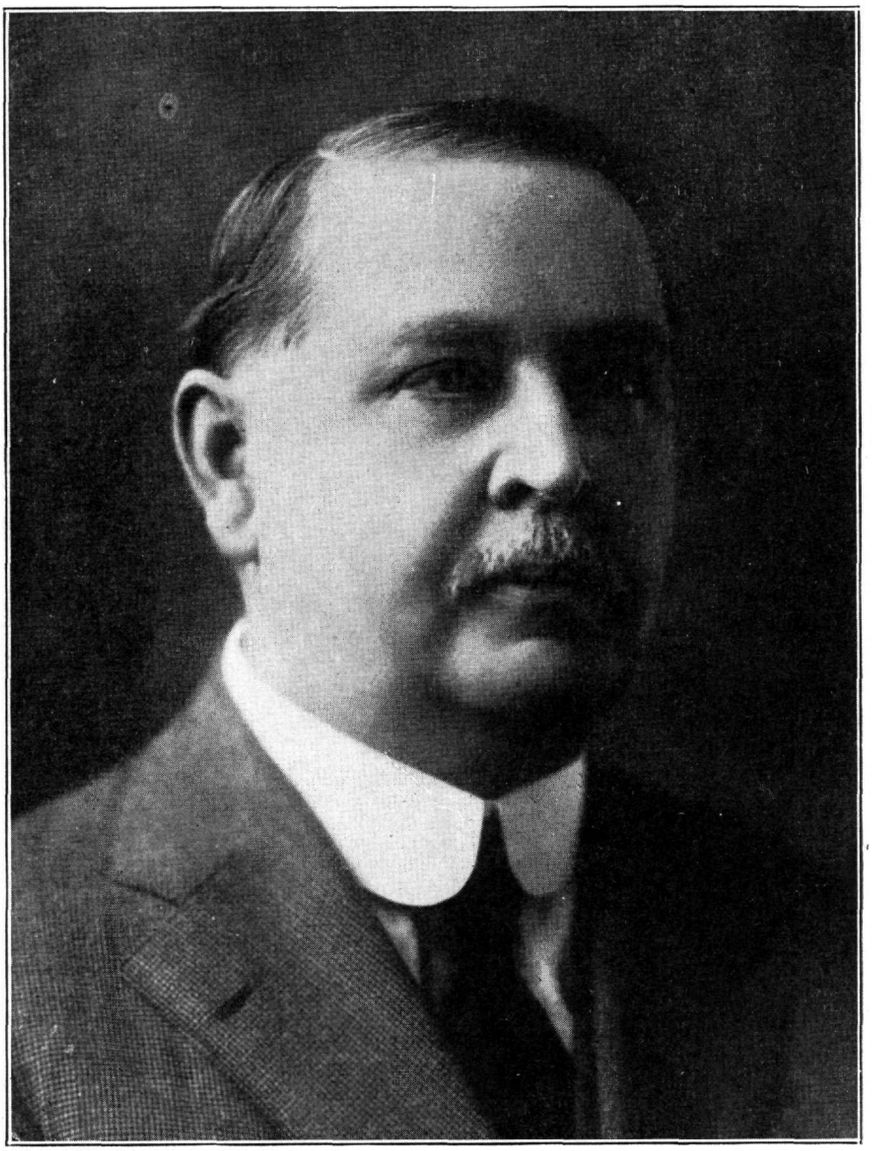

—Courtesy Alumni Monthly.

BENJAMIN GARVER LAMME

Benjamin Garver Lamme

By L. E. Kleinmaier

MEN like Benjamin Lamme are, as it were, the integrated personalities of an organization. They figuratively represent the aggregate. When they appear among us, a dynamic equilibrium, so to speak, of intellect, shrewd common sense, and exceptional health, they present the picture of success. In appearance even but surely in his astute sententious wisdom, I am reminded of Benjamin Franklin, more than a mere namesake." So spoke Mr. B. A. Behrand upon the occasion of the awarding of the Edison medal by the American Institute of Electrical Engineers to Mr. Lamme.

Benjamin Garver Lamme was Ohio born and Ohio educated. He was born near Springfield, January 12, 1864, on a typical Ohio farm. From his earliest years he liked to work with tools and started to make his own toys when he was very young. The engineer's quality of imagination was implanted within this child's mind. One of his chief enjoyments was the designing of various mechanical devices. He was not satisfied with the mere design but always constructed a working model to determine the feasibility of his plans.

The old-fashioned country school seemed to have been very beneficial to "B.G.," as he was called in later life. The pupils were allowed to work things out pretty much in their own way. This permitted Benjamin to develop the foundation of an unbelievable ability to carry on mental calculations that proved so beneficial in years to come.

Benjamin Lamme enrolled in the Freshman class at Ohio State University in 1883. At this date Ohio State was considered an "infidel" school because it was non-denominational. Many folks argued against his entrance to this institution but he finally persuaded his father to allow him to enroll because he was going to school to be a Mechanical Engineer and not an infidel. Lamme considered Prof. S. W. Robinson one of the ablest professors he had. While in school, "B. G." developed a general formula on the flow of gases in long pipe lines for Prof. Orton of the Geology Dept. He was an exceptional student and was able to solve difficult problems by mastering and applying the fundamentals. He received his degree in M.E. in 1888.

The work Lamme did for Prof. Orton on the flow of gases got him with the Westinghouse interests. He had written a letter to Mr. George Westinghouse stating the work he had done preparing the tables for gas flow. Mr. Westinghouse had done some work in the organization of the Philadelphia Natural Gas Co. Benjamin Lamme received a letter requesting him to report at once to the superintendent of the Philadelphia company. Upon his arrival the superintendent told Lamme that he knew nothing about the matter except that Mr. Westinghouse told him to give "B.G." a job.

Lamme was with the gas company only two months when he was placed in the shop of the Westinghouse Electric Co. at $30 a month. This was the beginning of his engineering career. One of his first duties was to clean up the machines. He also had to carry oil and polish all brass work. It was in this testing room that he received his first severe shock of 1100 volts and afterwards tried to find the person that kicked him. After four months in the testing room he accepted a position in the Incandescent Lamp Testing room at $40 a month. His duties were to label each lamp with the date on which it burned out.

Shortly after he had accepted this position, he was asked to make some calculations outside of his testing room work and his pay was increased to $50 a month. After his calculations were found applicable to various tests, his income was again increased to $70 a month. At this point Mr. Westinghouse decided to go into the street railway

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—Courtesy Alumni Monthly.

THE LAMME MEDAL

The Lamme Medal accompanies the Lamme Scholarships which are presented every year to two students in the College of Engineering

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business and "B.G." was told to get all of the available data and to calculate a double reduction gear motor for the street railways. The motor designed and constructed from these calculations was adopted as a standard and was the first Westinghouse machine actually produced from calculations.

The first revolutionary step with which "B. G." was connected was the development of the toothed armature. Mr. Schmid, the shop superintendent, had brought a model to Lamme with which he had trouble with the heating of the field structure. Cast iron poles could not be used for this reason. "B. G." suggested a change in the design of the armature teeth and that the size of the air gap be increased. This was such a vast improvement that the output of the toothed machine could be run up to 50% above that of the surface type. He developed the single reduction gear street car motor. His work consisted of developing motors, equalizers, rotary converters, and turbo-generators. During his life he took out 162 patents.

Mr. Lamme was the receipient of many honors. He was appointed on the Naval Consulting Board of the United States in 1915. He was awarded the Edison Medal of the American Institute of Electrical Engineers in 1919. This medal is awarded annually and was presented to Mr. Lamme "For Invention and Development of Electrical Machinery." He was also awarded the Joseph Sullivant gold medal by the Ohio State University. This medal is presented every five years to the alumnus who, in the judgment of the committee, has made the most notable contribution to the Liberal, the Fine, or the Mechanic arts since the last award. He received this award on January 11, 1923. As he received the initial award it is evident that the committee considered Benjamin Garver Lamme to be the most distinguished alumnus of Ohio State University at that date.

"B. G." was appointed Assistant Chief Engineer of the Westinghouse Co. in 1903. He was promoted to the position of Chief Engineer in 1903. He held this position until his death at Pittsburgh on July 8, 1924. His loss is keenly felt throughout the engineering world. He had an endless capacity for hard work. The only labor that was a drudgery to him was that which he felt would not benefit his fellow men. He was willing to follow any hobby as long as he felt he could excel in it. He had a wide experience in judging the ability of young engineers and would always assist them in finding the position best suited for the individual. He disliked notoriety and avoided all public dinners whenever he possibly could. He enjoyed good music and preferred reading imaginative or historical fiction.

Benjamin Garver Lamme was a remarkable engineer, cultured, and the possessor of a very liberal education. He was admired and respected by his associates and spent his entire life attempting to benefit mankind.

EDITOR'S NOTE: The material for this biography was largely obtained from *Benjamin Garver Lamme, An Autobiography.*